
FROM THE EDITOR: CHALLENGING MISCONCEPTIONS AND LOCATING JOY IN OUR TEACHING

Katherine Mason Cramer, *Kansas English* Editor in Chief
Wichita State University

Abstract

Kansas English Editor in Chief Katie Cramer challenges misconceptions about teaching and urges educators at all levels to celebrate the joy in our work.

Keywords: teaching profession, job satisfaction, misconceptions, joy

For one of my professional presentations this summer I was invited to Wichita Public Schools' [College and Career Boot Camp](#) to lead three breakout sessions for incoming high school seniors on what it takes to become a teacher. In addition to sharing information about university course work and field experiences, I also wanted to interrogate misleading narratives about the profession. Many of my teacher candidates report that when people ask them what they are studying and they respond with their plans to become middle or high school English teachers, their conversation partner usually has one of two responses: (1) over-the-top admiration/self-deprecation (e.g., *Oh wow, you are a hero. I could never do that; I don't have the patience.*), or (2) verbal and nonverbal expressions of horror (e.g., *Oh, you poor thing. How could you choose to go into that line of work? Bad pay. No respect. The kids these days. Good luck with that.*). The common perception is that teaching is joyless drudgery in which teachers are undervalued, undercompensated, and unhappy.

This makes recruitment and retention of teacher candidates and teachers challenging, to say the least; however, my colleague and WSU math education program chair Dr. Aubrey Neihaus recently shared the website [Get the Facts Out](#) (GFO) in our ongoing dialogue about growing the profession. GFO is a collaborative effort of four national societies, including the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators, funded by the National Science Foundation, with the stated mission of changing the narrative around teaching by addressing common misconceptions and celebrating the positives in the profession (GFO, n.d.).

So, I and my "boot camp" co-presenters (current Core 3 teacher interns Avery Byard and Amanda Hatfield and 2023 graduate Allison Detrick, who also presented at the 2022 KATE Conference!) set out to do just that in our presentations. And thankfully, we were prepared to do

this because most of our attendees were either on the fence about (or decidedly against) teaching when they arrived at our sessions (e.g., “Teaching is my Plan C if pediatric nursing or being a dental hygienist don’t work out,” and “The main reason I wouldn’t choose teaching is because of the bad pay.”). We were ready to resist misleading narratives and share the joys of teaching—from our own experiences and with data to back it up. Using GFO as a resource, we shared that ...

- The #1 reason people choose to teach is to make a difference in the lives of their students.
- Teachers in the United States rate their lives better than all other occupation groups, except physicians, citing student and colleague relationships; lifelong learning; creative freedom and autonomy in the classroom; flexible summers and known calendar, including intermittent breaks throughout year; and financial stability.
- Teacher salaries are competitive with other jobs you can get with the same degree—but with better retirement benefits.
- Eighty-seven percent of teachers report they are treated with respect by students and students’ families.
- Eighty-five percent report they are treated with respect by supervisors, and 95% by co-workers.

Yes, we all know that teaching is demanding work. But there is so much joy in that work. We know this in our classrooms as we plan, teach, assess, and build relationships with our students. We know this when we collaborate with colleagues to design meaningful learning experiences for ourselves and our students. We know this when we engage in [KATE’s Annual Conference](#) each fall and [KATE Camp](#) each summer. We know this when we participate in KATE socials and executive board meetings.

We know that there is joy in lifelong learning, and joy in applying that learning to our instructional design and teaching. There is joy in sharing ideas with one another and collaborating to improve our craft. The authors featured in this issue of *Kansas English* also know this, and they joyfully tackle a variety of topics important to ELA and literacy educators at all levels.

In “Perspectives from the President,” **KATE President Nathan G. Whitman** shares his take on the 2022-2023 academic year in Kansas with his typical wisdom, wit, and hope—and, this time, several football metaphors.

In their practitioner piece “Universal Design for Learning as a Pathway for Accessible Narrative Writing Practices for Diverse Adolescents,” **Reagan Murnan, Heidi Cornell, and Angela Beeler** advocate convincingly for ELA and literacy teachers to employ the UDL framework in their instructional design for narrative writing, sharing an illustrative vignette as well as digital tools to enhance accessibility.

In her practitioner piece “Being *Born a Crime* Didn’t Only Happen to Trevor Noah: A Student Inquiry Project on Criminalized Identities,” **Amanda Durnal** describes how she inspired student inquiry that resulted in a non-traditional research project in response to Noah’s memoir.

In his reflective essay “Knowing the Rules,” **Darren DeFrain** shares his experiences encouraging graduate teaching assistants to approach grammar instruction in first-year composition with humility and humor, alongside a sense of inquiry and wonder.

In his reflective essay “Draft Dodging: Learning the Art of Revision,” **Caleb K. Thornton** playfully examines and shares the story of his composing process, in particular his experiences with late revision, and considers applications to his writing instruction as he prepares for his first year of teaching English language arts.

Jessica Marston tackles a timely topic in her scholarly article “‘Pleasure to Burn?’ A Comprehensive Look into the History of Censoring Literature in School Environments,” providing

a detailed retrospective on book burning and book bans, as well as resources to respond to censorship.

In their scholarly article “Strengthening Teacher Preparation: Addressing Perceptions of Behavior Management and Bilingual Learners during Field Experiences,” **Victoria N. Seeger** and **Madeline S. Sherman** reveal how and why behavior management overshadowed an intended focus on literacy instruction for teacher candidates during a day-long literacy field experience and offer recommendations for teacher preparation programs.

In her scholarly article “Supporting New Teachers with Literacy Instruction: Small Changes to Graduate Literacy Programs that Can Have a Big Impact,” **Elizabeth A. Morphis** describes changes she made to her graduate literacy course content to deepen in-service teachers’ understanding of science of reading curriculum design and instruction.

Jennifer S. Dail reviews Brett Pierce’s 2022 book *Expanding Literacy: Bringing Digital Storytelling into Your Classroom* and highlights the ways in which this text supports teachers in appreciating students’ existing (digital) literacies and cultivating equitable classrooms and curriculums.

In their review of Natalie Goldberg’s *Three Simple Lines: A Writer’s Pilgrimage Into the Heart and Homeland of Haiku*, **Nathan G. Whitman**, **Beth Gulley**, and **Lori Muntz** enlighten us with Goldberg’s exploration of haiku’s history, traditions, and appeal while also offering a convincing argument and strategies for its thoughtful integration into ELA curricula.

Teaching Tips Column Editor Beth Gulley brings us pedagogical strategies from four author-educators’ classrooms that will “delight and inspire” readers of this issue. Column authors include **Curtis Becker**, **Carolyn Nelson**, **Jeremy M. Gulley**, and **Marianne Kunkel**.

Young adult (YA) book reviews from **Mackenzie Decker** and **YA Book Review Editor John Franklin** provide us with two middle grades books to add to our to-read list and (classroom) libraries.

We also find joy in photos of **Mary Harrison**’s classroom library at Wichita West High School interspersed throughout this issue. It’s impossible not to crack a smile when confronted with shelves and shelves of high-interest, high-quality books.

Wishing you joyful reading, friends!

References

GFO. (n.d.). About. Get the Facts Out. <https://getthefactsout.org/about/>

Author Biography

Katherine (Katie) Mason Cramer, Ph.D. (she/her) is starting her 14th year as Program Chair and Professor of English Education in Wichita State University’s School of Education. Prior to earning her doctorate, Katie was a middle school English teacher in Kansas City, Kansas, Public Schools, and she has maintained her Kansas teaching licenses (ELA 5-8 and 6-12) so that a joyful return to the middle or high school ELA classroom is always possible. She has been a member of KATE and on the Executive Board since moving back to Kansas (from Arizona and Georgia) in 2010, and she has served as Editor of *Kansas English* since 2017. Under her leadership, *Kansas English* has been honored with NCTE’s Affiliate Journal of Excellence Award in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Katie’s research and publications center the use of young adult literature to recognize, affirm, and teach diverse genders and sexualities in ELA classrooms and curricula. She can be reached at Katie.Cramer@wichita.edu.